United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Coconino National Forest
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File Code: 1950

Date: January 5, 2000

Dear Sir or Madam;

The enclosed document describes Proposed Actions for the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments, located approximately nine miles southeast of Flagstaff, Arizona. We propose to cut 14,774 acres of pinyon, juniper and small ponderosa pine trees for habitat improvement for pronghorn antelope, big game and update the current grazing allotment management plans and to. See attached map within the proposed action.

This project was listed in the Coconino National Forest *Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA), which was sent to a mailing list of over 500 addresses, December 15, 2000. This document is a more detailed explanation of the proposed project, and is sent to you because you are a nearby landowner, or because you expressed interest in the project.

Your comments are most helpful to us if received, in writing, within 30 days. Our desire is to receive substantive comment on the merits of the proposed action, as well as comments that address errors, misinformation, or information that has been omitted in the document. If you provide comments to this proposed action, you will receive the Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice. In the event you choose not to comment, but would like a copy of the final products, please contact us. If you do not respond in writing or call us telling us to keep you on the mailing list, you will not receive any further information on this project and you will be removed from this mailing list.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any persons may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets.

The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within seven days.

Please mail your comments to Peaks District Ranger Station, Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments, 5075 N Hwy 89, Flagstaff, Arizona 86004. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this proposal.

Sincerely,

JIM GOLDEN
Forest Supervisor

A. PROPOSED ACTION FOR GRASSLAND AND WOODLAND MANAGEMENT AND THE GRAZING MANAGEMENT THE PICKETT LAKE AND PADRE CANYON GRAZING ALLOTMENTS

Where: The Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments are adjacent allotments located approximately nine miles southeast of Flagstaff, Arizona, see Maps 1A & 1B. Pickett Lake Allotment runs from eastern boundary of the Coconino National Forest below the Anderson Mesa Rim, up the Anderson Mesa Rim, and approximately three miles west of Forest Highway 3 (Lake Mary Road) between Upper Lake Mary and Mormon Lake. Padre Canyon Allotment runs along the eastern edge of the Coconino National Forest boundary from Pickett Lake Allotment in the south to three miles south of Twin Arrows/I-40 Highway junction in the north.

Who: The Coconino National Forest proposes to…

What:

Action 1. Define pinyon, juniper and grassland management on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Grazing Allotments.

This proposal includes 14,774 acres of pinyon, juniper and ponderosa pine treatments. Ponderosa pine cuts would be on trees <6" in diameter at breast height (DBH). Slash crushing and seeding will be done in pinyon and juniper treatment areas where slash is heavy and dense trees have removed the grass seed source from the area Approximately $258,810 will be spent on cutting the trees. Approximately $95,500 will be spent on slash crushing, harrowing and seeding. Approximately $126,500 would be spent on archeological surveys on the tree cutting areas. The Forest Service will look for grants and partners to supplement normal Forest Service funds to complete the pinyon and juniper treatments, slash crushing, harrowing and seeding. The specific improvements costs are given on Table 1 and locations are shown on Maps 2A-C.

The following items are the proposed 14,774 acres of pinyon, juniper and ponderosa pine cuts including: 6537 acres of grassland maintenance cuts, 640 acres of spring enhancement cuts, 614 acres pinyon, juniper and ponderosa to grassland cuts and 6983 acres of pinyon and juniper forage and browse cuts.

> Proposed Pinyon, Juniper and Ponderosa Pine Treatments. *Grassland maintenance cuts* of young pinyon, juniper and ponderosa pine trees (<50 years old) will be completed on 6537 acres to maintain or improve habitat for pronghorn and other grassland species, watershed conditions and forage production. Approximately 10 to 20% of this area would be left as untreated multi-aged clumps. Pinyon pine, alligator juniper and ponderosa pine tree removal would be limited to those trees <6"DBH. A combination of chainsaws, hand clipping, hydraulic nippers and prescribed burning would be used to remove these trees. Slash would be lopped and scattered and/or crushed. Treatments would occur outside the pronghorn breeding season of April 15- June 15 to avoid disturbance during the fawning season.

Proposed Pinyon, Juniper and Ponderosa Pine Treatments. *Spring enhancement cuts* of pinyon and juniper trees will be completed on 640 acres to restore spring flows. Approximately 10 to 20% of this area would be left as untreated multi-aged clumps. A combination of chainsaws, hand clipping, hydraulic nippers and prescribed burning would be used to remove these trees. Commercial fuelwood harvest would be allowed in accessible areas. Slash would be lopped and scattered and/or crushed. Treatments would occur outside the pronghorn breeding season of April 15- June 15 to avoid disturbance during the fawning season.

Proposed Pinyon, Juniper and Ponderosa Pine Treatments. *Pinyon, juniper and ponderosa pine to grassland cuts* will be completed on 614 acres to create openings and corridors to maintain or improve habitat for pronghorn and other grassland species, watershed conditions and forage production. Approximately 10 to 20% of this area would be left as untreated multi-aged clumps. Pinyon pine, alligator juniper and ponderosa pine tree removal would be limited to those trees <6"DBH. A combination of chainsaws, hand clipping, hydraulic nippers and prescribed burning would be used to remove these trees. Commercial fuelwood harvest would be allowed in accessible areas. Slash would be lopped and scattered, crushed, or prescribed burned. Prescribed burning may only occur where slash exceeds 10 tons/acre and reduces habitat quality of pronghorn and big game (estimated at 80 acres**).** Treatments would occur outside the pronghorn breeding season of April 15- June 15 to avoid disturbance during the fawning season.

Proposed Pinyon, Juniper and Ponderosa Pine Treatments. *Pinyon and juniper forage and browse cuts* will be completed on 6983 acres to create small openings and corridors to maintain or improve habitat for big game, pronghorn and other grassland species, watershed conditions and forage production. Openings will be irregularly shaped. Within the openings, animals will be no further than 660 feet from hiding cover at any location. Untreated strips, at least 528 feet wide, will separate openings from each other. Approximately 20 to 35% of this cut area would be left as untreated multi-aged clumps. Pinyon pine and alligator juniper tree removal would be limited to trees <6" DBH. A combination of chainsaws, hand clipping, hydraulic nippers and prescribed burning would be used to remove these trees. Commercial fuelwood harvest would be allowed in accessible areas. Slash would be lopped and scattered, crushed, or prescribed burned. Prescribed burning may only occur where slash exceeds 10 tons/acre and reduces habitat quality of pronghorn and big game (estimated at 800 acres). No firewood cutting will occur in sensitive big game winter range areas between November 15 and April 30.

Proposed management will result in no effect to cultural resources. Management practices that tend to concentrate livestock will not be done on or near cultural resources. Implementation involving ground disturbance such as construction of range improvements and pinyon, juniper and grassland cuts will require separate site-specific archaeological clearance prior to implementation.

Action 2. Define terms and conditions for livestock grazing on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Grazing Allotments.

Both Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon grazing permits are issued to the same permittee. This joint ownership makes management coordination between the two allotments possible.

This proposal has a Forest Service permit of up to 850 cattle from June 1 to September 30 on the 34,814 acres Pickett Lake Allotment and up to 125 cattle from August 1 to September 30 on the 20,993 acres Padre Canyon Allotment. This is a 10% reduction in cattle use on Pickett Lake Allotment and a 31% reduction in cattle use on the Padre Canyon Allotment. In addition, this proposal has a combined grazing system option of up to 913 cattle from June 1 to September 30 on both allotment areas, a 14% overall reduction in cattle use. In addition to maintaining current range structures, approximately $25,600 will be spent on one mile of barbwire fence, four miles of pipeline and five drinkers. The Forest Service will spend approximately $13,700 primarily for materials and the permittee will spend approximately $11,900 primarily for installation of the improvements.

Annual Operating Instructions will adjust cattle numbers and/or grazing rotations so cattle use is consistent with current productivity (as in drought conditions) and so plant, soil and watershed conditions can be maintained or improved while range improvements are put in over time.

Utilization levels throughout both allotments will be set up to 35% by cattle and/or elk. When pasture use approaches 35% by cattle and/or elk, cattle will move to the next pasture in the rotation. If elk use exceeds 35% before cattle enter a pasture, cattle will skip this pasture and move to next pasture in the rotation. Adjustments in the Annual Operating Instructions would need to made if graze periods dates are adjusted more than one week. As we proceed into the new Allotment Management Plan, cattle numbers will be adjusted annually to meet this utilization standard.

The following areas on Forest Service lands will not be used by Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon cattle in the next 10 years: Ashurst Lake, Ashurst Spring and Long Lake (after the electric fence around Long Lake gets replaced by a barbwire fence).

The following items are proposed grazing schedules for each allotment and a combined grazing schedule. These grazing schedules are given as a guide to future use; however, these schedules may be adjusted to better meet the goals of this proposal because of monitoring, weather, etc. throughout the 10-year planned period. The Annual Operating Instructions are the document that may adjust livestock numbers, change of season of use, and pasture rest periods to respond to this new information. Each year, it will be decided whether to run two separate systems or run the combined system, as described below.

Pickett Lake Allotment Proposed Grazing Schedule**.** The Pickett Lake herd will graze a maximum number of 850 head of cattle from 6/1-9/30. The cattle run in an eight-pasture rest rotation grazing system. One to two pastures each year receive yearlong rest. The cows start below the Anderson Mesa Rim in June and rotate through six to seven of the eight pastures until the end of September. Each large pasture is rested at least once every five years. Cattle rotate clockwise and counter-clockwise through the pastures every other year. Graze periods vary from three to 34 days.

- *-Major differences from current management: a 10% reduction in cattle use with a reduction in the grazing season from five months to four months. Maximum pasture graze periods are reduced from 44 days to 34 days.*

Padre Canyon Allotment Proposed Grazing Schedule. The Padre Canyon herd will graze a maximum number of 125 head of cattle from 8/1-9/30. The cattle run in a four-pasture deferred rotation grazing system. Only two fenced pastures exist on the allotment, however, Mormon and Padre Canyons work as pasture divisions to realistically divide the allotment into four grazing units. The cattle are rotated through all four units during the grazing season and this use is rotated annually. Graze periods vary from 15 to 30 days.

- *-Major differences from current management: a 31% reduction in cattle use with a reduction in the grazing season from five to two months. Maximum pasture graze periods are reduced from 39 days to 30 days.*

Combining Pickett and Padre Allotments Proposed Grazing Schedule**.** The two allotments areas could be combined along with each cattle herd. Cattle numbers would be a maximum of 913 head from 6/1-9/30 (850 cattle for four months from Pickett Lake and 63 head for four months from Padre Canyon). The cattle run in a 10-pasture rest rotation grazing system. Cattle will run for approximately 30 days below the Anderson Mesa Rim either in June or September, every other year, with up to 20-day pasture graze periods. Pastures above Anderson Mesa Rim will graze the same as the Pickett Lake plan but with graze periods from three to 24 days. Two to three pastures each year would be rested from cattle grazing. This grazing system could only be used after the pipeline system are in place and enough pinyon and juniper trees are removed to make pasture gathering possible and practical below the Anderson Mesa Rim. Monitoring forest and cattle conditions will determine if combining herds is feasible over the long-term.

- *-Major differences from current management: a 14% reduction in cattle use for the combined allotment area from current use. The grazing season above the Anderson Mesa Rim is reduced from five months to three months. The grazing season below the Anderson Mesa Rim is reduced from five months to one month. Maximum pasture graze periods above the Anderson Mesa Rim are reduced from 44 days to 24 days. Maximum pasture graze periods below the Anderson Mesa Rim are reduced from 39 days to 20 days. In addition, one pasture below the rim is rested each year where no yearlong rest is currently done.*

Action 3. Noxious weed treatments will be needed on the allotment over the next 10 years. Current and future populations of diffuse knapweed, Scotch thistle, Mediterranean sage and other noxious weeds will be pulled, cut, mowed, steamed, dug or burned to reduce future spread of these species. A threatened, endangered and sensitive species specialist will be consulted before each treatment.

Action 4. Monitoring on this allotment over the next 10 years would include: compliance, allotment inspections, range readiness, forage production, rangeland utilization, condition and trend, soil and riparian condition, and threatened, endangered and sensitive (TE&S) species habitat, and archeological site condition.

Frequency and canopy cover plots and a soil condition rating will be continued or established at long term monitoring sites, in areas of concern or in areas where changes in trend are expected or needed throughout the allotment.

When: The Coconino National Forest expects a decision by July 2001. Implementation of the decision would begin by October 2001.

B. PURPOSE AND NEED – WHY:

All of the cattle management and vegetation treatments are designed to maintain or improve watershed and soil conditions throughout the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments and to provide productive grasslands that support grazing wildlife populations similar to existing levels, or as described by the Arizona Game and Fish Department's current and future population guidelines. Design features common to all actions ensure protection for cultural resources.

Action 1:

The grassland maintenance cuts are needed to maintain or improve habitat for pronghorn antelope and other grassland species, watershed conditions and forage production. Because fire has not occurred in its natural role for many years, young pinyon, juniper and pine trees have become established in grassland areas. The Forest Plan directs us to evaluate grassland communities and maintain or enhance grasslands where appropriate. Antelope are a management indicator species in the Forest Plan and it is desirable to maintain or enhance antelope habitat. Due to increasing abundance of rabbitbrush, juniper and pinyon, antelope habitat quality is declining.

The spring enhancement cuts of pinyon and juniper trees are designed to restore spring flows. Currently, trees are utilizing water that might otherwise travel into the shallow aquifer spring site. Reliable water and spring sites are necessary for wildlife. Maintaining springs also maintains riparian vegetation and species in the area. Riparian areas are key components of biodiversity in northern Arizona.

The pinyon, juniper and ponderosa pine to grassland cuts and the pinyon and juniper forage and browse cuts are designed to create openings and corridors to maintain or improve habitat for pronghorn and other grassland species, big game species watershed conditions and forage production. The resulting landscape of forested patches and openings will produce high quality grass, forb and shrub habitat.

Action 2:

The Pickett and Padre Allotments are scheduled for environmental analysis of grazing use on the Coconino National Forest, as required by the Burns Amendment (1995).

The proposed grazing systems are designed to improve cattle use of the area by maintaining or improving effective ground cover vegetation and implementing Best Management Practices for proper grazing use and livestock distribution. The goal is to move toward or maintain a desired

plant community, near the potential natural community, with productive grass, forbs and shrub understory. The forest plan directs us to maintain or improve forage species density, diversity and composition and emphasize cool season grass production. Although many of the acres within these allotments are in satisfactory watershed and ecological condition, there are places where improvements in understory vegetation are needed.

The fence and water improvements are designed to improve management on the allotment by keeping cattle from leaving scheduled pastures. There is currently a lack of reliable water sources on the Padre Canyon Allotment. Providing water benefits wildlife as well as cattle management.

The proposed utilization levels are given in the Forest Plan to provide adequate remaining forage for wildlife and nutrient cycling including threatened, endangered and sensitive species, big game and raptors. The proposed grazing systems also provide a cattle grazing management system that meets resource goals while providing opportunity to continue a viable ranching operation.

Action 3:

The noxious weed treatments are designed to stop the spread of noxious weeds on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments to keep native vegetation intact. Noxious weeds have the potential to out-compete native vegetation and cover acres with plants that are unpalatable or detrimental to the health of grazing wildlife and cattle.

Action 4:

The monitoring described under Action 3 is designed to verify that actions meet our goals.

C. DECISION TO BE MADE

The Forest Supervisor will decide whether or not to allow cattle grazing, allow current livestock use or change the lands that can be currently grazed, and in what manner. In addition, the Forest Supervisor will decide whether or not to conduct vegetative treatments including pinyon, juniper, ponderosa pine and noxious weeds, and in what manner.

Proposed Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotment Improvements

Table 1

Item	Total Costs	FS Costs	Permittee Costs	Grants*
D. Structural Improvements				
Barbwire Fence Along Anderson Mesa Rim (1 mile)	$5,800	$2,300	$3,500	
Pipelines (4 miles) and Drinkers (5) From Walter Well	$19,800	$11,400	$8,400	
Pinyon and Juniper Treatments				
Grassland Maintenance Cuts (6537 Acres)	$196,110			$196,110
Archeological Surveys for Above Cuts	$50,600			$50,600
Spring and Grassland P-J Cuts (1254 acres)	$62,700			$62,700
Archeological Surveys for Above Cuts	$7,700			$7,700
Forage & Browse P-J Cuts (6983 Acres) Commercial Fuelwood Sales with Hand and Bobcat Follow-up Treatment	No cost, pays for itself by collection fees			
Archeological Surveys for Above Cuts	$68,200			$68,200
Slash Crushing and Seeding (3000 Acres)	$90,000			$90,000
Harrowing and Seeding				
Yellowjacket Wildfire Area (100 acres)	$5,500			$5,500
Archeological Surveys for Harrowing	$1,000			$1,000
Totals	**$507,410**	**$13,700**	**$11,900**	**$481,810**

Barbwire Fence
Materials $2300, Labor $3500 = $5800/mile
Pipeline
Materials $0.35/ft., Labor $0.35, = $3700/mile
Drinker - $800
Grassland Maintenance Cuts - $30/acre
Spring & Restoration Cuts- $50/acre
Forage & Browse Cuts - $50/acre
Slash Crushing and Seeding - $30/acre
Harrowing and Seeding - $55/acre

ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEYS
Grassland Cuts - $8/acre
Spring & Restoration Cuts - $6/ac
Forage and Browse Cuts - $10/ac
Harrowing - $10/ac

*Grants – Includes all funding from outside Forest Service range dollars including grants, co-op's, partnerships and cost-share agreements. Some Forest Service funds maybe used as part of these agreements.